4(Mersadier

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Bambara FA8

/For a detailed study of the income and expenses of 4 Bambara families in the city of Thiès, Senegal (including percentage of income spent on and average consumption of particular foodstuffs) see 4: Mersadier, MS37 Senegal, Category 116./

776 brought to the middle of the river and thrown in while the villagers
782 prayed the spirit to give the village his protection and to bring rain to future harvests.

Faro's Taboos

776 All of Faro's subjects, in particular the Bambara of both sexes and
784 of all ages, are requested to respect a certain number of taboos.

The black earth, bogo fi, of the river banks, used ritually in many instances, would be excellent in pottery making. The women potters, however, cannot use it because it blackens in the process of baking. No pottery that has been fired may be washed in those places haunted by the spirit (1).

1. At Ségou, numerous drownings are blamed on the increasing frequency with which this taboo is broken.

[26] Butter in many places is forbidden by Faro and may not be preserved in water. (2)

2. This taboo is linked to the relation between Faro and the Peul, but the nature of their relationship has not been clarified.

No one crosses the river without opening his luggage and presenting Faro with the gold, copper, or food it contains. As a rule, the wearing of metals is forbidden in those places haunted by the spirit.

776 The principal taboo concerns menstrual blood which was originally
784 caused to flow because of the sins and impurity of Mousso /52/
841 Koroni. No menstruating woman may visit the places inhabited by Faro; none may draw water, wash clothes or cooking utensils, or cleanse herself in any of these spots. In addition, a man whose wife is in such condition must refrain from appearing at religious ceremonies or, if he is a priest, from performing the ritual.

In this part of Africa, as in many others, menses are conceived of as a necessary flow of empty blood, impure because it has not contributed to the formation of the foetus, the embryo of which each

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to replace the blood lost in childbirth; this piece is then burned to hasten the healing of the wounds.

The loincloth of a woman who has given birth to twins is made of the sukaba band with large, regular, alternating squares of yellow and indigo. The mother places on the garment as an offering a little of the millet mash she feeds her children for the first time.

The band nyoronga was formerly used for shrouds. The king would wear a whole garment of this or had three bands sewn onto his tunic when he went off to war; thus he wore his own shroud. A brave man would tie a piece of it to the barrel of his rifle to show his indifference in the face of death. A strip was tied to the right hand of those killed on the battlefield as a reward for having done their duty. Today, a shred of this band is hung at the door of a home where a death has occurred; People bandage a wounded limb with it before going to the healer's.

The wutu tyerokole with three stripes is worn by a child born after the death in infancy of numerous brothers and sisters. It represents the departure of these members of the family and their return in the newborn. Shaking such a band in the air honors the seventh sky and the seventh earth and asks their protection for the child. This cloth is never worn at funerals.

/113/ The kemba (literally, mother of scarifications) (Pl. III, a, 10) substitutes for scarifications when it has not been possible to perform them; on the other hand, this band is taboo to those who are ritually scarred.

The warabawolo (Pl. III, a, 12) represents the lion of the Diara: the first son of this family was born on this cloth. A boy born with a lock of hair on his forehead is seated on the cotton band to make him strong and rich. Formerly the king made a rug for his throne out of it. Since the lion is their taboo, the Diara do not have the right to wear it or even to see it.

Weapons and Tools

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Originally, men lived by hunting and fishing. But hunger drove them to eat plants of which the first three are the yayalẽ, an aquatic plant commonly found on the shores of the Niger; the narakata, couch grass; and the norolã size, commonly called cramcram((1). Long

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1. These three plants are respectively: Andropogon (Hyparrhenia) hirtus, Digitaria debilis, Cenchrus catharticus.

before the cultivation of cotton and cereals was known to them, the Bambara worked the soil with wooden sticks around the base of those grasses whose seeds they then sowed. As their stock of tools developed, they began to make the first hoes and axes. In the case of the Mandé Bambara (2) the origin of these tools is linked with the history of the

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2. The names and the origin of tools of the Bambara of the Ségou region are different.

blacksmiths, numu, who form a kind of caste in this part of Africa as in many others. They practice endogamy, maintain joking relationships, senankuya, with other Blacks, and are in charge of certain cults dedicated to ancestors and to Faro (3).

3. On the myth of the divine origin of blacksmiths, see S. de Ganay, "Notes sur la théodicée bambara." See also infra, p. 53 n. 1

Before the discovery of metal, ancestors of the present blacksmiths worked with wood, then stone. From then on they bore the name of numu, a term which today is reserved exclusively for the artisans of iron, jirifa numu or farafa numu, according to whether they worked with wood or stone (4).

4. L. Desplagnes mentions the historical aspect of the origin and role of the Sudanese blacksmiths (Le Plateau central nigérien /The Central Nigerian Plateau/, p. 110).

The peoples issued from the intermixture of the ou, shepherds (Getules), with the ar, sedentary tribes (Fari), have already been pointed out in earliest antiquity by writers, historians, and geographers who called them Numidians. Salluste tells us that "The Faronsũ, in mixing with the

794 On the following night, the future initiates are led into the bush to a place called biri yoro (literally, place of initiation), where they sit down upon the ground, their heads covered with a piece of cloth.

At a sign from the dyolokotigi, a member causes the ritual instruments to roar or sing in succession; then he hides them and the postulants must find them. As they are not able to do so, a series of hazings are inflicted upon them (1) after which they are shown the

1. These hazings are often severe; fun is made of the ignorance and fears of the postulant.

instruments and each in turn made to repeat the solemn oath:

"If you have heard the dyara of the uncircumcised, that is it. Chisel a piece of wood, make a hole, put a string through, turn it, it is that which is the word of the ndomo dyara. If you reveal it, may it take your heart, may it take your liver, may it kill you" (2).

2. Ni ye me bilakorow ka ndomo dyara, nin do ka djiri dese, ka wo bo o la, ka dyuru ndo o la, o bi fyeku, o de bi ndomo dyara ka fo, ni ya korobo, a ki sõ ta, a ki biñe ta, a ki fa.

Next, they are made to lick three times the object which is then entrusted to them so that they may learn to use it. The same ritual is performed for each instrument, and the prayer is repeated with only a change in the name.

The young men frequently sacrifice upon the altars of the ndomo. 794 The usual content of the sacrifice is the gray lizard /margouillat/, 782 busa, likened to an uncircumcised boy (its tail representing the 825 foreskin). The victim's wanzo, liberated by death, joins the wanzo contained in the altars and, consequently, that of the members. [262] The animal is then cooked and eaten.

C. Activity of the Society

794 At the time the fields are being cultivated, the members who are called upon to do work take their ritual objects along. The young

304 The foreskin, which is tied by a string (drawn at the center of the
532 blade) at the moment of the operation, is placed upon the pembele
413 (black rectangle) and the cutting knife is tapped with a small wooden mallet, gossilã (drawn at the tip of the knife). These three figures receive during operation the offering of the first spurt of blood from the circumcised boy.

The line, which crosses the blade along the middle, separates the bird and the ancestors who gave proof of courage from the instruments used for the circumcision. As a division it symbolizes first of all that each grade of circumcised boys must be considered apart from the others. This is its social meaning. But the delicacy of the line itself has a meaning which applies to the individual: each one must, in his own image, be morally /183/ simple, just, and sensitive. By conforming to the rule symbolically indicated by the design, the individual will become a member of the elite.

304 The date of the operation is fixed when Mousso Koroni's star, sigi
787 dolo (Sirius), rises in the evening at a certain point in the east (1).
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1. See note 1 p. 47. To determine the date, however, the ndomo society may be consulted, which sometimes postpones it to keep its members longer.

After the boys to be operated have been counted, each gets ready, and on the appointed day the mother washes her son's penis with water in which an iron axe or hoe has been soaked. Then she prepares a dish
[262] of rice, ye farina to "dish of man's bravery," which the child eats before he is led to the place of the operation, called yorola sakole "reserved place," located in the bush.

304 When all are gathered together the blacksmith-circumciser operates
326 upon each one in turn after he has made them sit down in a circle on the ground. Pulling and twisting the foreskin, he ties it with the string which he keeps taut by securing its extremity between his toes. He next places the member upon the pembele, rests the knife /on the foreskin/ and taps /it/ with the wooden mallet. In this way he cuts off the foreskin while saying the following words:

"Circumcised one, your father, your grandfather, your great-grandfather, the father of that one too, the ear (the genitals) of the ancestors of the latter have withstood (the pain); you, yourself, withstand it as

794 attacked /206/ the fighters. Between dances the participants drink beer
796 brought to the spot for the occasion in order to nourish the invisible beings which they represent.

[262] All the participants also eat a dish made up of peas, beans, groundnuts, rice, manioc, millet, fonio, cooked with baobab leaves and karite oil. This mixture is identified with the spirits' struggle with the clouds which they supposedly swallow at the height of the battle. When the ceremony draws to an end, the chief sends the women and children home and fetches the kwore boli which he swings eighteen times over the square.

In a file, the members of the society return to the tree to "bring back" the Kworè which, while invisible, has been present at all the ceremonies. They circle around the tree singing to the rhythm of the drums. Then they put out their torches and throw them at the foot of the tree along with the whips before returning to their homes.

[752] Their wounds and burns are cared for by their wives with water from the Kworè altar, this medication bearing the name of kworę kane (remedy of the Kworè).

The same dances and the comings out of the mask take place three days in succession. On the fourth day the chief and the elders, all undressed, crawl to the sanctuary for the annual sacrifice offered inside it. The chief gathers the thunder stones collected during the past year and places them in the sack containing the altars which are to be sold.

To "clarify" the mirrors, he pours millet mash over them; he cut the throat of fowls and places kola nut juice over the snake and the ñõ boli; he next fills the ñõ boli with millet previously taken from that of the Komo. With the remaining seeds he makes a mash with which to pour a libation over the sack. He next passes a burning twig of straw over the snake while saying:

"You, snake, you do not fear the fire; you must not fear fire and rain" (1).

1. E ngorongo e ma sira tasuma ne e kana sira sandyi tasuma fie.

The effect of this action is to prepare the snake by means of these burns and to attract lightning whose effects it must not fear.

595 A husband owes his wife food, clothing, and lodging within his means, and unless he has imprudently acquired too many wives, everything will be kept within the proper limits. In any event, he must be impartial toward all his wives on one particular point if he wants domestic tranquillity: he must honor each of them in turn with his favors.

In theory, a husband is supposed to treat his wives alike in all things, although it is apparent from the foregoing that this is practically impossible. Besides, it is usually agreed that the first wife, no matter who she is, whether slave or free, has certain prerogatives. She acts as a kind of mother to her co-wives, supervises their work and their pursuits, and issues all the supplies. With reference to her husband, she acts as confidante and adviser.

851 Filiation. This is to be regarded as the totality of facts which, for the sake of clarity, we shall divide into two groups: birth, and giving a name. [209]

Birth. 843 A pregnant woman, by virtue of her condition, is subject to a kind of special regime whose special features are the following.

In principle, she must forego sexual relations from the moment she feels the child move until two or three months after its birth. This is not done for reasons of hygiene, but rather because the child is thought to require it as a kind of deference, without which it will die.

From the standpoint of diet, the expectant mother should be well and even abundantly fed. When possible she is given the [262] heart and liver of slaughtered wild animals; these are centers of life which, if eaten, will strengthen the child's soul and make the child a courageous individual. [261] [443] A pregnant woman often wants some of the yellow or red clay which is sold in the markets, which for some unknown reason she will eat as if it were chocolate.

She must refrain from visiting dying people, attending funerals, going into mourning, or mingling with crowds, all this in order to avoid any contact that might injure the fragile soul she is carrying.

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Soli (2)

2. The word soli is used in Kaarta; at Ségou the term is boloko or ngolo-ko, literally, "affair of birth."

The single word soli is used for what we call circumcision and excision. This is because a Bambara has in mind not this or that surgical operation, accessory in nature, but rather the ceremony which for boys and girls alike marks the passage or, more accurately in line with the etymology of the word soli, the fact of being born to a new status.

881 The soli does not take place every year, because it involves considerable expense for the families, which they cannot always meet. At the instigation of the boys who must undergo the soli and who, therefore are called soli-ma-u (people of the soli), the family heads assemble at the call of the nyana-n-son-na-ba to decide whether or not the soli will be held. If the decision is affirmative, the boys and girls then take steps to make sure that the festival (nyara, "orgy, wedding") will be as elaborate as possible. In principle, the date coincides with the third day of the festival of the sheep.

Guided by their elders, the young girls (soli-ma-moso-u) go from door to door to solicit millet for the banquet (3) which

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3. The menu includes couscous (basi), and it is called soli-kili-basi, "basi of the solicitation for the soli," on account of the source of the millet used to prepare it, solicited by the children.

they are expected to give the elders (koro-u) on the second day of the feast of the sheep. The period of the ceremonies of the soli actually begins with this meal. [241]

In the afternoon of this day, the boys make the customary sacrifice to their genie-protector, dancing in his honor in ceremonial costume but without flagellation.

881 302 On the same day the young girls in certain localities have a characteristic ceremony. One of them whitens her face, breast, and back with a mixture of milk and ashes. Thus daubed, she dashes out of the village brandishing the spatula (to-n-galama) which is used to stir mush (to) in the pot; her companions follow her, shouting. The band goes around the village four times in this fashion, each time stopping at the crossroads. At these points the girl who is bedaubed throws handfuls of food (1), provided by her companions, to the spirits,

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1. Usually basi (couscous) made with fish.

crying: "Dege dule (2)." Her companions reply: "Naloma (3)."

2. Literally, "thick mush."

3. That is, "fool."

881 527 [273] [576] The eve of the soli (soli-si). During the evening preceding the soli, the families concerned enjoy an ample meal, accompanied by innumerable jugs of beer (dlo) as is the custom at all festivals among the Bambara. This is a time of special merriment, of shining faces and greasy hands, and it is good form for the men and boys to belch noisily, saying repeatedly: "ne ne fa," literally, "I am full," that is, "I am replete." The [301] women wander about the lanes, wrapped in their best skirts, with balls of amber in their hair and small silver or even gold rings in their ears and nostrils and rather heavy bracelets on their [482] arms and ankles. Some carry jars of dlo on their heads, while others carry gourds full of couscous, dege, or hot sauces which are often nauseous with smoked or spoiled fish. After the meal everyone gathers on the public square, forming a wide circle whose center is reserved for the dancers; piles of dried millet [373] stalks are used to make bright fires which illuminate the scene and warm the audience.

881 302 The "boys of the soli" (soli-ma-tye-u), their heads freshly

825 village, I thought at first that here lay the reason for this rest, extraor-
787 dinary during the time of the most intensive hoeing. Not at all; the
pagan Bambara were resting, and the women were giving their hus-
● [262] bands and children dégé (millet flour mixed with milk and honey
water) in obedience to a hyena's command. The hyena, it was said
-- and all the sorcerers confirmed this -- had emerged from its dumb-
ness, its tongue had been loosed, and it had predicted to the people
of the west that a plague even more terrible than that of the cater-
pillars would descend on the country. Only one means to avert it
remained: to refrain from going to the fields on Friday and to treat
themselves to dégé, the food so dear to Moslems.

482 On my excursions I have often met men and women carrying
757 on their heads a gourd or a basket containing a handful of leaves or
824 some bundles of roots, and apart from the customary greetings it
784 has been impossible for me to get a word out of them. And why this
silence? They were carrying a medicinal plant, a remedy which
would lose all its virtue and all its efficacy if they conversed on the
way, and they had to take care not to trample such-and-such a plant
that grew on the edge of the path.

757 The Bambara quite readily names the plants and herbs whose
753 curative powers are known to him, and yet in the presence of a sick
784 person he will very seldom give you the name of the remedy the
latter is taking, or the names of the roots and leaves that make up
his poultices. Sickness, he believes is a force, a power which tortures
our bodies. He is afraid that in naming the remedy he would pro-
vide this power with a weapon against its healing virtue, which is
another force or power. He sets the second power against the first
to make it leave.

811 It is evident that he attributes bits of reason and emotion to
784 everything, that he attributes human feelings to all that is animate
and inanimate. The "taboos" are not merely one piece of evidence
of this, they are an irrefutable proof of this attitude.

784 and-such a liquid, that animal, object, or liquid assumes a certain sacredness, and the Bambara calls it a tné. It thus conforms to the definition of a taboo that A. Lang gives us in Chapter III of his work Mythes, cults et religions, and Nicolay in Chapter II, Volume I, of his work Histoires des croyances, moeurs, coutumes also says: "To be taboo is to be marked by a religious sign."

The tné, or taboos, are legion in Bambara country. Not only does each lineage have its own, but the goua, or families, the confraternities, villages, individuals, genii, and plants also have theirs. Many are permanent in that they are perpetuated from generation to generation. Others, on the contrary, are impermanent; they pass, fall into disuse, disappear, or are dropped as soon as they become inconvenient. All depends upon the authority from which they are derived.

Taboos can be divided into five groups. There are lineage taboos, family taboos, taboos of the djiné genii and the boli genii, and finally plant taboos. I have given some legends concerning lineage taboos (see p. 8 ff.); these are permanent, passed on from generation to generation, and cannot disappear. /23/ They embody the idea of the ancestor, not in the sense that they merge and become one, but rather because the animal or plant has saved the stock by saving him. The tné have become the fathers of the Bambara in the broad sense of the word; they are, on an ancestor's name, or diamou, like armorial bearings on a shield, and a Bambara cannot rid himself of them. The ancestor has bound himself to the tné as a result of a service rendered, and his oath has made the union so close that if one disappeared the other would disappear with it -- how could one repudiate someone who is, and was, an ancestor and whose name, or diamou one bears!

784 Family taboos also have their legends and resemble those of
713 lineages. They are different, however; the service was rendered to
262 a member of the family and not to its head. In addition, the taboos are less extensive and include only a part of a species or race. To cite just one example, certain Dambélé may not buy, raise, kill, or eat a da-n-fign, or black dog, but they are not thereby prevented

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[362] from owning, killing, or eating a dog of another color; a dish of dog is even a delicacy served during orgies in honor of the fetishes Nia, Komo, Kono, Nama, etc. The dog is taboo for them, but only the black dog, and the reason is as follows: A Dambélé family was working their fields, and every noon the wife in charge of cooking brought them gruel. One fine day the cook, seeing her child asleep, laid him on the mat and left.... Hardly had she reached the field when the big black dog arrived, yapping and whining, running toward the village and coming back, and yapping and whining even more. This performance puzzled everyone, and they all dropped their hoes and followed the dog back to the village. The dwelling had been consumed by fire and was only a pile of ashes.... "My child, my child," cried the mother at once, desperate and wild with grief.... And the dog pranced around her, put its paws on her shoulders, licked her with joyful growls, and seemed to say to her: "Have no fear, I have saved him." It had in fact saved the child; seeing the fire in the dwelling, it thought of the child, took him gently in its mouth, and carried him to the hut where karité nuts were being roasted. They found him there, well and safe, sound asleep, and from that day on they took the black dog as tné; all the family respected and /24/ venerated it, and their descendants still respect and venerate it today.

784 Family tné sometimes become taboo for a whole village. For example, where the Dambélé of the black dog are powerful because of their number and especially through their affinal ties, members of outside lineages avoid raising these dogs or eating their flesh, out of respect for the old people and to spare the feelings of their wives and families. Little by little the custom takes root and the animal becomes a tné or taboo for everyone.

Its durability, however, is nowhere near that of a lineage taboo. A Dambélé woman married into a village where the black dog is not taboo may refrain as much as possible from eating its flesh, but she will not fear it long. Little by little the taboo is forgotten, and only a vague memory stays with her: "An dougou tné do, for the village I came from it is taboo," she may say, but it will seem to her that for her it is no longer so. As to members of outside

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3. Gnéna Who Roam the Village and Its Environs

These gnéna like especially to sit where paths cross and somewhat resemble the gnâma, even though they are different (2). They

2. See what I said about the gnâma in the first chapter.

protect from spells and sorcery, give health and exorcise sickness, and it is not unusual in the morning at daybreak or in the evening just as the sun is about to disappear to see men and especially old women sprinkling a little clear water here and there at a crossing of paths. They are interceding for children and grandchildren or for a member of the family who is sick and lying on his mat, or they are imploring the gnéna to protect them from an enemy or an evil spell, or to shelter them from the gnâma.

776 782 Although these gnéna have no official priest, they nevertheless receive many gifts, and there is no circumcised man who does not feel obliged to make them his small offering, at one time or another. At crossings of paths one throws them preferably flour mixed with water, cowrie shells, milk, hatching eggs, ashes of herbs and plants, gruel, kola nuts, and sorghum cakes. At children's festivals the fodder is thrown to them in greater abundance; the cakes pile up at the entrance of the village (to the great joy of dogs and hens), and the ground is moistened with a light dew of blood (3). On the second day of the

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3. All these offerings are made by the order of a sorcerer and are called saraka. See what I have said about the saraka in Chapter IV, Section I, "Belief in God."

drinking bout, which corresponds to the festival of the كبنتن (sheep), the soli girls, who are shortly to be excised, throw them the remains of the basi k'li in great handfuls without counting. Basi k'li is the name given to the repast provided for the whole village on this

776 day by the soli (those who are to be excised). It is a kind of semolina
782 (very fine couscous called basi) which is eaten with an /88/ extremely
304 spicy sauce of smoked fish. It is called basi k'li because, in order to
262 provide this repast, the little girls are obliged to run from door to door, clapping their hands, singing and begging (k'li).

776 Among the invisible wanderers, there is one which is strongly
825 reminiscent of our "werewolf." It is the souroukou, an imaginary
514 hyena, whose supposed existence has brought about a strange practice. Every evening one sees groups of little boys and groups of little girls, turning aside a little into the bush: they all go in a band to take their last precautions and attend to the wants of nature -- union is strength even against the gnéna.

776 Many other gnéna are among this group that roams the village; they flutter in the b'lon, or entrance huts, they live in horrible filth, hung over doors, on the walls, and on the posts that support the terrace roofs, and the only hangings to be seen anywhere are eggshells, heads of millet, fruit pits, and seeds from the bush, which are offered to these friends as saraka. Nor are private huts without them, for the gnéna roll in the ashes of the hearth, snore on the mats, and take the air in the conari (1); there are some everywhere.

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1. The conari is a baked earth receptacle used for water, beer, and cooking food.

Finally, there are gnéna or djiné who are powerful. Without mercy for their enemies, whom they abandon to all kinds of sorcery and evil spells, they are full of both attention and consideration for their friends. They can cause sickness, poverty, and other calamities to descend on a family, a village, or a whole region; but they can also side with them against a visible or invisible enemy; they can protect them, exorcise anything, and grant real blessings to each and all. The characteristic trait of the gnéna, in fact, is not that they can refrain from doing harm, but that they can also do good directly by performing a good act. Some choose to live in a rock, others prefer a knoll or a large tree near the village, and there are those who